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Chapter 3

Beyond the academic ethic

Stephen Turner

Introduction

In the early 1980s, Edward Shils, together with others, undertook the task of defining what he called 'The Academic Ethic' and elaborated these ideas in a report on principles and considerations governing academic appointments at the University of Chicago (1982/1997) and in his Jefferson Lecture on the relation between the University and the State (1979). It is perhaps best to think of this task in terms used by Alasdair MacIntyre in many of his writings, in which he observes that the explicit formulation of an ethical doctrine typically came at the point where it was no longer a matter of general tacit acceptance, but was becoming lost, as when heroic virtue of Agammenon is articulated by Thrasymachus in the non-heroic world of fifth century BC Athens (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 130), or the public virtues of honour of Roman society, which have been rendered obsolete by social disorder, are articulated by the Stoics, in a burst of ethical writings, as private virtues (MacIntyre, 1966, p. 108). Shils's exchanges with his friends and collaborators who commented on the project bear this out: they understood the changes in circumstances that had made what they took to be the traditional academic ethic obsolescent if not obsolete and were formulating it in order to defend it in the face of these changes.

Shils understood science in terms of what might be called 'the liberal theory of science', which treated scientists, and by extension all of academia, as independent agents seeking truth in their own ways, governed by their own sense of what was promising to research, bound together only by their mutual dependence as scholars and teachers and by a strong tradition of truth-seeking and mutual respect. At the time he was writing, the threat could be understood in terms of the problem of the relation of the university to the state, and the conflicts between the intrinsic aims of the university and the temporary aims of the state.

Today we have a new problematic, which is being defined, in an outpouring of writings by academics about the audit or performance culture, as the rule of universities by administrators, and their effects on science and

academic life generally. These writings typically also appeal to a vestigial form of the liberal theory of science. Although there are attempts to replace this theory, none of them adequately express the new situation. And like Shils nearly 40 years ago, this is an 'owl of Minerva flying at dusk' moment. The authors recognise that the damage has been done and is irreversible. They protest against it. They are also paralysed by it.

What is the relevance of these 'traditional' academic values today? If the liberal theory of science is dead, what are the reasons, and what are the practical realities that have replaced it? Answering these questions takes us to the heart of problems of the organisation and financing of academic life, the audit culture, and the question of truth itself. It also requires avoiding nostalgia for an imagined past, and gaining a realistic understanding of the past, and of the reasons it cannot be returned to. For those who are happy with the present, and there are many beneficiaries of the current order of academic life who are (despite their complaining about not getting enough of what they want quickly enough), these are non-issues. For those who are not, there should be a way of self-understanding that is an alternative to pure despair.

Understanding the present also requires a deeper understanding not only of the 'traditional' academic past of the mid-twentieth century but also of the status quo ante the world of academia and learning prior to the research university and to the spread of the German model of the late nineteenth century which inspired the research university. This prior, and much older, model still can be detected in a few formal features of academic life, and prowls around, as Weber puts it, like the ghost of dead religious beliefs. It is this prior model, or so I shall claim, that perhaps provides the best answer to the question of what sort of vocation or calling for the life of the mind exists and should exist today.

The liberal theory of science

The academic ethic as Shils described it was a complex of rights and responsibilities that served to define the morality of action within an institutional arrangement. It is perhaps best to begin with the arrangement and what it entailed, and what variations existed. The institutional arrangement was between universities and various other bodies, of which the state was, in European countries, the most important. The model for this arrangement was the German academic system of the late nineteenth century, which became the model for the modern research university. The university professed to be, as Shils put it, 'the methodical discovery and the teaching of truths about serious and important things' (1982/1997, p. 3). Unlike other tasks, however, such as producing food or providing services, this task had no natural connection to a market, nor to a place in a stable economic division of labour. It depended instead on indirect connections, notably to the

professions, in which learning made the recipient of this knowledge more valuable for the tasks of that profession, or served as a cultural value that universities could turn into income.

Much of the change with which we will be concerned is quite recent. It was only with what Christopher Jenks and David Reisman described in *The Academic Revolution* (Jencks & Riesman, 1968/1977), the changes of the 1950s and 1960s, that expectations for ordinary academics included a significant, or any, amount of 'research'. The triad of teaching, research and service which is at the core of many evaluation systems in universities derives from the teaching, research and extension triad of the American land grant universities of the nineteenth century. But in its original form, these were largely separate functions: research took place at an experimental farm, often located hundreds of miles from the university; extension was training for farmers that occurred largely where the farmers lived; teaching was done at the university by people who did little or no 'research' of any kind. Colleges and Universities focussed on training. Harvard University, for the first three centuries of its existence, was essentially a training school for congregational ministers, a task it still performs. The ministry was a paradigmatic profession: a calling but also a source of income and a status in an established institution, in this case the church. The same could be said for Cambridge and Oxford, which not only produced for the religious market but had religious tests for entry late in the nineteenth century, and whose presses still rely on revenue from the Bible market. One could multiply examples indefinitely. On the continent, the market relation was to the state – which needed educated administrators. The value of the university was not for its pursuit of truth, but for its ability to provide some sort of educational experience and some sort of certification which the market, in the Harvard case the congregations hiring the minster, valued. To be sure, there was a small minority of students who valued knowledge for its own sake and were able and willing to pay for instruction. But this small minority would never be large or rich enough to support a university, and there were never enough academic jobs for them to constitute an academic class of the scale of present academia.

The relationship with the professions produced a particular kind of university which persisted and grew over a millennia, with typical groupings of 'faculties' associated with the professions, and some sort of core liberal arts faculty which provided instruction that was considered to be more elementary and general. Until the nineteenth century these faculties were more concerned with the transmission of dogma than 'discovery' and were often strikingly retrograde in relation to the knowledge available outside the university. The logic of exclusion was central to the traditional university: it was a means of certifying that those trained within it conformed to the accepted truths. This fits with the demands of certification, and exclusion helped make the certification valuable.

It is important to understand how the university and academia related to intellectual life at large. Universities were places where people were learned, and went through various tests to show they were learned. A dissertation in the sixteenth century was a recapitulation of the professor's notes – the real test was the *viva*, in which the candidate demonstrated an ability to defend these views on his feet. In Britain, college fellowships were awarded based on exams, not production – and production was largely optional and in many cases non-existent, well into the postwar era. At the same time, there was a lively non-academic world of learning, and also of production – indeed, this is where the ideas normally emerged. This dual world was somewhat permeable until what William James called 'the Ph.D octopus' (1903) strangled the university – as evidenced by the career of James himself. But until the academic revolution, which occurred over a long period, led by the 'research universities', the qualifications of a professor were learning, not production. And one can see this even in the institutions of the German university, where the *Habilitationsschrift* must be in a different specialty than the PhD dissertation, and where there was originally no expectation that professors produce beyond this demonstration of learning.

This system began to break down in the nineteenth century with the emergence of chemistry as a valuable form of knowledge not directly linked to a profession. The transformative figure is the chemist Justus Leibig, whose chemical discoveries launched an international business in agricultural products, attracted students from all over the world and made him into a business magnate as well as a professor with a large and lively laboratory. This was knowledge that was valuable for a market other than the professions, and although its value was in a sense indirect as well, the users applied the knowledge and used the products themselves. The process of discovery could be tailored to the needs of the agricultural market. A new model was born. Liebig was not obliged to produce 'impact' or monetise his research, but he did. Chemistry research itself became valuable, and science generally became valuable, whether or not there were practical applications. It was enough that sometimes something came out of it, or that training in science benefitted someone. Soon enough it did, with applications of chemical knowledge to medical issues.

It was not until the late nineteenth century that a new model emerged based on the granting of PhDs and the creation of the modern set of disciplines. In the United States the origins of the modern category of research universities dates from 1915. The list has barely changed since then. But these universities were still primarily teaching institutions, with heavy teaching loads, and a scattering of productive 'research' faculty most of whose 'research' consisted of cataloguing existing knowledge in textbooks. Pressure to publish was very limited. The choice to write was largely voluntary. Peer-review was not burdensome. Book publishing outside of the textbook market was difficult, usually subsidised, and relatively rare, and there were few journals.

Decisions to publish were typically made by editors, without a̅ ͘ice. These were the conditions under which the following was true:

> In the traditional university, professors were "unaccountable." The university was a sacred space where they were at liberty to pursue with students and colleagues their fields of inquiry without coercion or interference. This doesn't mean they were free without qualification, of course. Professors were deeply accountable, but in a sense that went far beyond the reach, ambition, and perhaps even the interests of the administrative caste — they were accountable to discover and then to tell the truth, and to encourage their students to do the same.
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> (Srigley, 2018, February 22, n.p.)

This passage was taken from one of the many responses to the new regime of administrative control of the university through metrics and 'goals'. It reiterates ideas that Shils also expresses. And it is a source of confusion because much of the same language is used ideologically to describe the more recent past, the period after the academic revolution. This period was not free of coercion, but the coercion took a particular form.

Professionalisation

What changed? In a word, professionalisation. The description on the back of Jencks and Reisman's (1968/1977) book describes its message as follows:

> academic professionalism is an advance over amateur gentility, but they warn of its dangers and limitations: the elitism and arrogance implicit in meritocracy, the myopia that derives from a strictly academic view of human experience and understanding, the complacency that comes from making technical competence an end rather than a means.

Philosophers went from modestly saying, accurately, that they 'taught philosophy' to saying they were 'philosophers' or even 'professional philosophers' to distinguish them from other things that go by the name of philosophy. In sociology, the name of the American Sociological Society was changed to the acronymically less anatomical American Sociological Association to reflect the new status of 'profession'. Political sciences became 'scientific', with the behaviouralist revolution, whose leaders are now mercifully forgotten. The term 'scholar' was consistent with knowing and expounding, and with the value of learning as an end in itself: the term 'profession' implied not merely 'professing' but possessing a specific set of skills and body of knowledge that was in some sense exclusive – unlike the mere learning of the amateur.

Why did it change? The story varies from country to country and field to field, but much of it had to do with the rapid expansion of universities in the

two decades after the Second World War. In much of Europe this meant the transformation of universities from sleepy places with scholars who pursued their own arcane interests to places brimming with students. In the United States something similar happened. In both cases a new model of the academic career emerged, which was less individualistic and more tied to the idea of a discipline of judging and evaluating peers. In science, there was a different process, more closely related to funding, which eventually came to affect the rest of the academy.

The point of professions is to exclude and gain benefits from excluding. And the transition to professionalisation was marked by a kind of punitiveness towards not only amateurs but also deviants, people who failed to get with the new programme and so forth. Andrew Abbott discusses the reign of Peter Blau and Peter Rossi at the *American Journal of Sociology* in the 1950s, before the transition to the later dependence on peer-review (Abbott, 1999, pp. 140–148). Decisions were not arbitrary, but depended on conformity to the standards that they self-confidently set. There was a strong, and strongly self-justifying, sense of professional standards that just happened to be their standards, and included themselves and their friends and excluded the scholars of the past, as well as most of the 'profession' of which they were a part. Something similar happened in all the fields of the humanities and social sciences.

In a sense the Old Boys' network which the revolutionaries overthrew became more insidious than before. In the older system, it was taken for granted that appointments were culturally coded, and that merit was secondary. But because academic life itself was less oppressive, the system was less oppressive. No one could reasonably hope to be an Ivy-League professor who could not act the part; but there were other places they would fit in without being excluded from scholarship. The combination of the Old Boys' network and disciplinarisation relegated those outside the network to humiliation as well as exclusion, all in the name of professionalisation.[1]

At the time of the professionalisation of humanities and social science disciplines there was consciousness of the change and laments about it. These typically came in the form of criticism of the flight from teaching that this system allowed in elite universities and the declining status of teaching. Jacques Barzun was a typical but highly visible example (Champion, 2018). The flight from teaching was of course hierarchical: it was a feature of elite institutions that only slowly spread to their imitators, and rich institutions mitigated the change by continuing to provide a more traditional 'liberal arts' education to its younger students, though over time the number of people not caught up in professionalisation who could do this in the old way dwindled. So, the flight from teaching reinforced hierarchy and intensified the pressure to conform to the new idea of 'professional'. Competition also affected salaries. For the first time academics who were considered disciplinary leaders or celebrities received enormous salaries: one chair of

political science was rumoured to be making $100,0 in the mid-1970s, a salary equivalent to more than $600,000 today. The era of celebrity academics had arrived, though now they needed only to be disciplinary celebrities, who were only read by other academics. The political scientist who cashed in on this status at the University of Chicago, David Easton, was not at all a public intellectual, nor did he even write about politics in a way that was remotely relevant to actual politics, despite working in the heart of the south side of Chicago, home of one of the most corrupt and powerful political systems in the country.

Professionalisation as a power system

With the rise of professionalisation or disciplinary control there became a sharp sense among many scholars that the demands of disciplinary competition were inimical to genuine scholarship, to thought and to the examination of serious questions – even the serious questions of the disciplines themselves. The criticisms made by Barzun with regard to the decline of teaching were interlaced with comments on the triviality of much of what came to pass as 'professional research' as well as its subordination to political agendas (Champion, 2018). Professionalism put paid to the standard of 'serious things' by erecting a new standard: acceptability in the academic labour market. If a graduate student, or tenure-seeking junior colleague comes to you with a serious and deep project, one is compelled to advise him or her that in order to be employed one must produce, that a modest but doable project would be better, and that one should take care to check the journals to see what is fashionable in the area of this project and therefore needs to be cited and if need be praised – this is the standard of the peers to which disciplinarisation makes the hopeful student subject. At the beginning of the project of professionalisation, when the professionalisers themselves were trained in the older fashion, the gap between the two standards was not terribly obvious. The flush job market of the 1960s following the expansion of the universities and the students of the baby-boom allowed for a freedom that was unprecedented and never to be repeated. When the contraction occurred – in the early 1970s in the United States – not only did disciplinary standards become more coercive, a new set of ascriptive criteria was imposed on hiring.

The history of disciplinarisation has been written many times, for many disciplines, but for what follows a brief summary is useful in order to understand what followed the failure of these projects. At the time of the formation of these disciplines, science had already taken a more or less modern disciplinary form, and by virtue of its practical applications, especially in chemistry, had established a 'professional' identity apart from the academy. In the United States, and at roughly the same time in other countries – the United Kingdom preserved amateurism longer, and preserved a kind of

museum of academic eccentrics at Cambridge and Oxford immune from outside influences. Ironically, this last group was the source of many of the professionalising ideas in the humanities (cf. for philosophy, Searle, 2015). The first wave of professionalisation in the United States was at the time of the formation of disciplines, roughly 1890–1905. This was followed in the 1920s by a series of 'news': the new history, the new political science, and by large changes in related disciplines, as well as the humanities. This generation asked variations of the question Robert Merriam, *consigliere* of the Rockefeller philanthropies and proponent of the new political science, asked about political theory: 'will our older friends have to go?' For the time being political theory, which was included in the field as part of the original construction of the discipline, survived. Similarly, for the other fields – pockets of less professionalised scholarship persisted, though often in a lower status.

The postwar period saw a reinvention of the impulse to scientise, which treated the previous attempt as a failure. 'Behavioural science', and its hallmarks of quantification, attitude studies and a different set of statistical techniques, taken mostly from social psychology, dominated this effort. Previously, social science statistics had required a staff with rows of calculators to produce correlations, so quantification at this level was rare; now a set of tables and Chi-square tests of significance sufficed. With computerisation this changed again, and new methods requiring more number-crunching power were used, and the older kind of correlational analysis returned because it no longer required the human labour of the past. This movement was a 'success' in academic terms, inasmuch as it attracted foundation funding, and then government funding, and quickly came to dominate the labour market in the relevant fields. There was a self-conscious sense of ridding these fields of 'intellectuals'. As W. F. Ogburn put it,

> There are a number of criteria which have been considered of high value in the past which I think should be of decreasing value in the future. If we agree that the goal of sociology is too scientific I would not pay too much attention to scholarship as such in the Department of Sociology. Obviously in the humanities its place is at the top. I would be inclined to subdue interest in social philosophy though of course it has a place somewhere in the university curriculum. My guess is that the role of theory as formerly held is due for some deflation. Scientific theory is of course not. The old time conception of theory is really something of a grand synthesis or system of ideas, none of which are ever set up in the form that can be demonstrated scientifically. Theory in both sociology and economics has largely been a system of ideas.
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> (Ogburn, ca. 1953)

The subsequent history of this department and the rest of academic social science proved to be the realisation of this ideal – scholarship was out, and 'science' was in. And the conflict between the two was evident: scholarship belonged somewhere, but somewhere else.

These newly configured fields recruited students with intellectual or broadly 'political' and reformist interests and turned them, with a certain amount of bullying, into professionals. The original flame of intellectual interest did not completely die out among the students, but there was no question of who had the status and power in these fields. And there was no return to the past: this generation of postwar scientisers obliterated the older kind of scholarship by ignoring it. Even the canonical classics were reduced to snippets, as was done by the Columbia sociology department, which taught them by providing sheets of out-of-context paragraphs that were selected because they related to the new vision of the field. Something similar happened in field after field: in philosophy the great thinkers of the past were reduced to simplified argument forms, and those forms were what was taught.

The younger generation rebelled against this new order. They installed Pitirim Sorokin as the President of the ASA, and Hans J. Morgenthau as president of the APSA, in defiance of their elders. And they read and identified with C. Wright Mills's *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), a book that has still not lost its power. But this was not a success story; it was a tragedy. As Edward Shils pointed out in a brutal review of the book in *World Politics* (1961), there was no intellectually realisable programme there but instead a reversion to historicism and an endorsement of works of 'a degree of pompous vagueness which', Shils says, were reminiscent 'of the windy formalities of the University of Frankfurt before Hitler closed down German sociology in 1933' (1961, p. 613). Shils was an idiosyncratic product of the 1930s, an amateur sociologist who never received a degree in the subject, an admirer of European intellectuals, and initially an enthusiast for the post-war professionalisation of sociology, an enthusiasm that soon waned. In this review he acknowledges and agrees with much of Mills's critique of the sociology of the time. But both the review and the book are better understood as a lament for academic values that were already fading into irrelevance.

The 1960s was thus a decade of institutional triumph for the professionalisers, and of creeping intellectual failure. The students they attracted and kept, once it became clear that the projects had failed, were either careerists who believed in the project only to the extent that it advanced their careers or were intellectually and politically inclined against the project and openly hostile to it. Thus it came to pass that the generation of 1968, clever and energetic, found themselves in the 1970s and 1980s with a collapsed job market and a collapsed and dying programme of professionalisation. This core fact extended to the whole of the humanities and social sciences with the exception of economics and perhaps linguistics. The emergence of post-modernism was not the cause of the failure of all of these professionalising programmes but a symptom and a restatement in flowery language of

the obvious: that the programmes had fractured into pieces that no longer fit together nor made sense apart from the larger failed programme that had originally generated them. There was going to be no 'science of society', or of politics or culture, nor were any of the systematising projects of philosophy going to be any more than academic games.[2] The post-modernists were assigned the blame for this failure. But to quote Cavafy, 'Those people were a kind of solution' (1904/1992).

Degenerate professionalisation

While this drama was playing out, the institutional ground was shifting. By looking at Shils's strictures written during this period, we can get a better sense of what the new compulsions of the academic world would be. Shils was attempting to show how much of what was emerging in his own time conflicted with the pre-professional academic ethic of the past, which he nevertheless professed to discern continuing in the professionalised practices of his own time. And the comparison can give us a way of inferring the significance of the changes for the question of what sort of 'vocation for science', to use Weber's phrase of a century ago, is possible today. The ethic described by Shils pointed even farther back, to the period before professionalisation – before what William James called 'the PhD octopus' (1903) – and before Shils's ideal of 'distinguished contributions', to a period in which learning itself was a value. The mark of this change, for me, is exemplified by the story of the candidate for a position in Trinity College Dublin, who sent in a package of reprints. One of the members of the committee on appointments responded by commenting 'bloody pamphleteer'. The pamphleteers ultimately won.

To understand this change, and its effects, it is necessary to address some painful issues. The key issue is this: science professionalised successfully, though not without its own issues of overproduction and waste. But the standards of science and the standards and reality of non-science fields differ dramatically. The use of science standards for non-science fields is an inevitable consequence of the need to balance the claims of each. But because science is the tail that wags the dog of the university, and also the source of its main claims to public utility, science sets the standards for everyone. These standards are, however, impossible for the humanities and social sciences to meet. The money is not there for large grants, there are no patents or marketable technologies, or very few. And we come to a basic fact. The project of professionalisation in the humanities and social sciences failed, and the analogous project in the sciences succeeded. In both cases the effects on traditional academic values were devastating.

The intellectual side of this failure in the social sciences and philosophy is a familiar story. Both were influenced by Logical Positivism, which promised to make each of them into sciences or something like science. In each field, the project ran into trouble, then critics, then to the collapse of the very idea. This is traditionally ascribed to post-modernism and Kuhn (1962/2012), and both placed a mark on what followed and constitutes the present situation, but post-modernism was less a cause than a symptom: the corpse of the professionalisation project was already rotting. Within Logical Positivism there had already been a debate that had surfaced fatal criticisms. The Kuhnian alternative provided a way of thinking of science that avoided these criticisms. In the postwar era the scientisation of the social sciences had been significant as a way of getting rid of traditionally minded scholars: the motto of Whitehead quoted by Merton at the time was 'a science that hesitates to forget its founders is lost' (Merton, 1957/1968, p. 38).

But the positive project of making social science into science was a disaster. The 'laws' and confirmed theories that were supposed to be the hallmark of science never appeared, and the statistical methods that were supposed to underpin this science produced many 'results' and an empowered class of researchers, but nothing like science. In science itself there was also a failure: the Unity of Science movement, which provided an intellectually serious goal for science and a model of science as a project, disappeared as science itself professionalised into separate domains.

The consequences of this for the present are simple enough. Science is no longer a possible model for the humanities and social sciences. The truths of professionalised science are not the all-embracing ones posited by the unity of science movement, but truths that are patentable, impactful, and usable for regulation or policy decision-making, and objective in a practical, technological sense rather than a transcendental sense. This is a model that is not available to social science or the humanities, except perhaps in areas like demography, economics, machine cognition and so on. But without this model of truth the humanities and social sciences, organised as professions but incapable of being professions in the originally intended sense, nevertheless are faced with the basic realities of intellectual life. About this we need to be clear: the basic fact of intellectual life is that it does not pay for itself. All knowledge regimes, of which professionalism is only one, need for there to be a source of income and support that derives from something other than the intellectual work itself. The academic regime in science derives this support from grants and teaching. In the humanities and social sciences it derives from teaching, and for a few highly exceptional people – public celebrities – from lecture fees and writing for the public, or writing widely used textbooks. Professionalisation was a way of marketing teaching in which the students did not become merely learned, but mini-professionals in their field.

The love of learning in a time of academic cholera

The system that emerged from the failure of professionalisation is brutally hierarchical. The division of labour stretches the notion of teacher-scholar to the limits. In the 1980s Shils could still write, speaking to the University of Chicago, that 'There should be no appointment in which the appointed person is expected to spend most of his time on classroom teaching' (Shils, 1997, p. 144). This is of course the fate of most 'professors' in the United States. Those who have time assigned to 'research' are members of a bizarre kind of aristocracy, and the inequality is increasing. Currently in the United States, nearly half of all college-level teaching is done by 'adjunct' faculty who do nothing for their pay but teach, and there is a growing number of 'lectureship' appointments that amount to adjunct positions added together, and allow for little or no advancement and miniscule pay.

For the people on the bottom, the relentless demand for teaching of the pre-professional period has changed only by the introduction of ever more scrutiny, in such forms as student evaluations, and the casualisation of this labour and the attendant impoverishment and insecurity. In the older world of impoverished academia before the First World War, professors at least had to be paid enough to be kept alive. In the new world of adjuncts and oversupply, they did not: teachers who had worked for decades for small amounts of pay could be and were casually dismissed, and the pay is often below subsistence levels. This class of academic proletarians enabled institutions to compete with one another in research by off-loading the work of teaching so that research could thrive. But this system did not benefit the humanities and social sciences, except marginally. The money went to the natural sciences and to supporting its research.

Yet there is a certain similarity between the teachers of the pre-professional order and present adjuncts, if one ignores the basic features of their existence – the boredom of teaching elementary classes repetitively, the large classes, the need to police unmotivated students and so forth. These adjuncts are free from the constraints of the professional system and can join movements against it – such as the movement against professional philosophy. Having no status and nothing to lose, they can choose to live the life of the mind as they please, to be learned without producing, and pursue projects if they wish, or decline to do so. They are also free in their intellectual life from the limits of disciplines and can read what they want. People without families to support can even enjoy this freedom, despite the lack of status and the poverty, if they can survive. All that is needed for a certain kind of happiness is to give up the hope of a tenured academic position.

The situation in science is only slightly better since a PhD scientist normally has skills that can be put to use elsewhere. The normal career in academic science is, however, just as marginal: if a person is lucky enough to

get into the academic system at all, it will be in the form of a succession of poorly paid post-docs in which one performs routine laboratory tasks as part of someone else's research. The opportunities for tenure-track jobs are scarce, the competition is highly internationalised and fierce, and the level of desperation is high.

Academic life is selective, and the grounds for advancement at each stage are not clear, except for degree requirements, and depending on the system and the point in history, many are called who are not chosen. So the question of what sort of calling academic life has become is also a question about the calling of those who fall by the wayside. This has recently become a hot topic as a result of an op-ed by an historian who was giving up on academia, after having failed, despite some short term contracts, to gain a tenure-track job. She writes that

> Giving up on something that you thought was your life's calling hurts like hell. When you experience rejection from the entire institution of academia after devoting years of your life and thousands of dollars to become an academic, betrayal and rage sometimes become your only emotions for a good long while.
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> (Munro, 2017, May 14, n.p.)

This comment has gone viral, and there are dozens of sites devoted to 'leaving academia'. They tell a bitter story about the myth of academic life and its seductions. One website describes its orientation as reflecting 'a belief that the current system is flawed, cruel, unsustainable and therefore impossible to directly engage with'. As a commentator explains, 'In this view, Ph.D. programs, with their false promises, lure students to serve as cheap labour, first as teaching assistants, then as poorly paid adjuncts when tenure-track jobs elude them' (Tuhus-Dubrow, 2013, November 1, p. 32). Many of the comments and contributions reflect the fact that the education that the injured academics have received is highly specialised – to leave academia is to face the impossible task of repackaging their achievements as marketable skills.

We can ask what relation this sense of 'calling' has to the academic ethic described by Shils. Are these cries of pain merely laments for a lost opportunity to pursue a career and to acquire the glittering prizes of the academic aristocracy? Certainly it is a part of current academic experience that students with high hopes gradually realise that the system is not based on merit, and suspect that they lack the qualities to succeed in it. And while these victims of the system realise that the promises were false, and that the system is cruel, the cruellest consequence is that the model of the 'professional' discipline in which they were trained gained them little beyond an introduction to the life of the mind that was limited and flawed.

The tragedy

The generation of which Shils was a junior member, born around the turn of the century, was a particularly extraordinary one, academically. Their prominence was perhaps enhanced by the accident of the rise of Hitler and the great German emigration. This posed challenges to academic establishments across the West and infused local intellectual traditions with new ideas. They were flexible and had to be. Many of them changed fields, changed orientations, and all of them had to adapt to succeed. But this was also the generation that constructed the post-war disciplinary world, without having been trained under it. They produced students who were different from them, responded to different career contingencies and a different academic labour market.

In a sense, it is the world of this younger generation, the one that started academic life in the middle of the century under a newly stabilised scheme of disciplines that Shils is describing in his writings on the academic ethic. They are the generation that both accepted and enforced the disciplinary order. Their legacy was a rigid disciplinary hierarchy, a narrow definition of professional and a form of training for students that was itself narrow, focussed on the job market and the academic hierarchy, and the demands of peer-review in the journal system. There was resistance, but the resistance was futile. Their legacy was intellectual failure. But the disciplines and institutional structures they created were a straitjacket that was impossible for subsequent generations to remove.

The logic of disciplinarisation had a dynamic that went beyond the aims of its creators – markets constrained teaching, competition constrained hiring, peer-review constrained publication, all with the result of the creation of a new kind of winner. The expansion and enrichment of the universities, and the democratisation of entry, made the jobs of the winners especially desirable. The market rewarded a certain kind of cleverness and the peer-review system rewarded conformity. The winners were, accordingly, clever and conformist, though they would deny this, and point to their minor technical achievements as evidence of their innovative thinking. Nor could they be challenged within the system, which was increasingly unequal. The system of disciplinary enforcement that had been imposed as a personal mission by the generation of the mid-twentieth century now was a machine that simply perpetuated itself – an enforcement mechanism that did its enforcing impersonally and therefore apparently objectively and without authoritarianism.

It was, however, a machine that had no direction. It disciplined without a common intellectual purpose – Shils's sense of 'serious and important things'. And it was soon metricised in ways that entrenched the winners and whatever made them winners. Education became, tacitly, education to succeed in the system. Peer-review became predictable as an affirmation of the hierarchy. Merit was no longer a matter of debate, but a matter of counting. What counted varied, but the importance of the top journals remained and was confirmed by such things as impact factors.

The system that remained was thus long on discipline, long on constraint, but short on intelligible purpose. The scientising generation of the mid-twentieth century at least had that, and it was a purpose that could be and was subject to withering critique. But the system that replaced it had no purpose. And, ironically, it was therefore vulnerable to ideological capture.

For Shils, the point of the academic ethic was that it was an integral part of an institutional order that successfully produced truth. Today his notion of truth and of serious and important things would be challenged by critics who would argue that it excluded the interests and experiences of women, oppressed races, the victims of colonialism, the global south and so on. Some Critical Race theorists deny any supra-individual notions of truth; all of them oppose 'merit', which they dismiss as a magical concept, denying that test scores, elite credentials and so forth have any intrinsic connection to anything called merit (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1228). For them, and for many others, appeals to merit, or to older notions of what is serious and important, are taken as an ideological front for white male supremacy. The institutional order has also changed, to one driven almost entirely by metricised standards of quality, together with calculated administrative responses to public issues. These were outcomes Shils would have considered abhorrent. But they raise the question of what can an individual do today in the face of these changes in order to recapture some remnant of the academic ethic? Or whether it is simply no lŗ̃ger relevant, or whether the institution itself is fatally flawed.

Learning as a value

In addressing this bundle of questions I will make no gesture in the direction of institutional reform. I will also ignore the case of the celebrity scholar who has been able to transcend the limitations of the peer-review system by virtue of high academic status or membership in a high-status clique. The dominance, not to say destruction, of the university by the implementation of the professional model and the metricisation and politicisation of merit is for the foreseeable future irreversible. The social sciences and humanities have in any case shrunk to insignificance in the contemporary university and are under constant assault by the well-funded partisans of STEM. They can at best adapt to survive. As they decline, the distortions will become more rather than less extreme. But there remains the question of what the individual can, or should, do in the face of this institutional situation. Even the most relentless institutional order provides for opportunities to resist or escape. My concern will be to identify, if possible, the remnant of the academic ethic that is worth saving, that is accessible to the intelligent and intellectually inclined person, and to ask how it can be realised in the present.

What is worth saving? The academic ethic was preceded by and depended on a different, pre-professional ideal. We can call this the ideal of learning and the personal goal of being a learned person – which in earlier times was also a socially respected status.

This was a status with social support and recognition. Professors in the pre-professional era were learned persons, primarily, specialists secondarily, if at all. They embodied the ideals of what is now called slow academia and craftsmanship – these were the norms of academic production at the time. But they were never the only learned persons – unlike 'professionals' this was not a status based on exclusion. Moreover, there was a vast body of intelligent and interested readers, without specialised academic training, who read 'Great Books'; participated in reading groups and programmes; bought the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and the *Encyclopædia Americana* (which had contributors like Weber and Robertson Smith) and other imitators; proudly displayed, and even read, the Harvard Five Foot Shelf; and did not think of the university as having a monopoly on either knowledge or wisdom. Indeed, Charles Eliot, the president of Harvard, gave a speech to an audience of working men in which he declared that a five-foot shelf of books could provide 'a good substitute for a liberal education in youth to anyone who would read them with devotion, even if he could spare but fifteen minutes a day for reading'.

When Shils speaks of serious and important things, he is using the language of the pre-professional learned person. And it was this language, and these goals, that professionalisation supplanted. But for at least some of those seduced or bullied into professionalisation, some version of this older ideal still remained salient. And sometimes, for those who soured on the professional model, it was turned against the professional ideal. In philosophy, for example, there is an active movement *against* professional philosophy (http://againstprofphil.org/), and there are efforts to preserve a connection with philosophy among the academically dispossessed – people who have gone on to make their living outside academia. So there is something alive in the idea of learning, despite the hegemony of 'professionalism' in academia and the hegemony of the university over intellectual life.

Becoming learned is a goal open to everyone. It is not hierarchical – one can learn from anyone, whether they are discoverers or just learned people, or people who simply know things you do not. To be learned is not to be an expert on a canon, even a liberal arts canon. It is not to be a specialist: to be learned is to be able to integrate different kinds of knowledge. To be sure, being learned was a status that had an association with snobbery, but this association was largely a product of academia and *its* snobbery and exclusions, not something intrinsic to learning. People are learned, and if there is hierarchy, it is a hierarchy that is personal: the Harvard Five Foot Shelf, despite its limitations, was nevertheless a vast collection of ideas and perspectives, which inclined the mind to tolerance and difference, rather than dogma. And one might add that the kinds of readers that the 'shelf' attracted were themselves eager to learn beyond the shelf. One might cite the Tagore craze, the fascination with Indian religions that followed from the Columbian Exposition, the vogue of Zen Buddhism and the mid-twentieth century obsession with East-West relations, including such figures as Nobelist and

best seller Pearl Buck. On a more elevated level, F. C. S. Northrop's 1946 book, *The Meeting of East and West*, has been continuously popular and in print ever since. This, not learning as some sort of covert ideology, is what has been lost in the present university.

With this we come to questions of value. To re-establish learning as a value is as difficult as any other reform of values. It needs social support, institutional acknowledgement and opportunities that correspond to it. The professionalisation of the humanities and social sciences undermined all three. But the much discussed 'crisis of the humanities', and the crisis that should afflict the social sciences as a result of such things as the replication and p-hacking crisis and the internal critique by John P. A. Ioannidis of the statistical practices that the social sciences rely on, may present an opportunity for reconsidering the professional model itself (2005). We will not pry the winners away from it. But for those outside the charmed circle, this is an opportunity we need to take. The distortions of the present system, and what Gloria Origgi correctly describes as our 'voluntary epistemic servitude' to it, are obvious (Origgi, 2015, p. 216). The institutional alternatives are not obvious. But learning is a value that is moribund but not dead. And if we value it we have a basis for resisting the professional machine, and perhaps for something more.

Notes

1   There is a fascinating book on the much loved sociologist *Austin Porterfield, A ....n's Grasp Should Exceed His Reach: A Biography of Sociologist Austin Larimore Porterfield*, by Leonard Cain (2005), which describes the way in which Porterfield created a journal of medical sociology and importuned leading figures, such as Merton, to support it, only to be condescended to and humiliated, and eventually to have the project expropriated.
2   Richard Rorty chronicles the collapse of the project of analytic philosophy in the two retrospective essays in the reprints of *The Linguistic Turn* (1967/1992). Professionalised philosophy of course continued as a Zombie discipline despite the loss of purpose, as did the other professionalised disciplines of the humanities and social sciences.

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Chapter 4

Academic service

Attachment, belief and hope

Nick Osbaldiston, Fabian Cannizzo and Christian Mauri

Introduction

> Don't forget that we are called, or at least I hope so, to have an influence, that we must stimulate work around us, that we will be influential less by the perfection of our own work than by the activity of our thought, that by the need, the desire, the sacred fire of organized work that will emanate from us.
>
> (Hubert in Riley, 2010, p. 189)

What this volume seeks to provide is discussion around the narrative of discontent with the changing nature of academic labour. Belonging, identity and the craft itself are now removed from the supposed 'golden age' of knowledge creation. Neoliberalism in particular is touted as moving us towards a far more individualised and competitive culture wherein the pressures and intensities of academic life, particularly for the precariat, are defining this vocation as less valuable than in previous generations (see Mauri, this volume; Davies & Bansel, 2005; Parker & Jary, 1995). Nuanced accounts of academic life drill down further into the reflexive lives of individuals through narratives of care, planning, rationalisation and authenticity (Archer, 2008a, 2008b; Cannizzo, 2018; this volume). Nevertheless, today, as Turner (this volume, p. 36) notes, several authors lament at the decline of our university culture 'protest it' but 'are also paralysed by it'.

One of the areas less discussed but arguably impacted on greatly by this is academic service (Macfarlane, 2005, 2007; Pfeifer, 2016). In particular, the nature of the academic ethic, perhaps first touted by Weber (1919/2016, p. 339; see also Shils, 1997; Turner, this volume; Cannizzo, this volume) as the 'inner experience' or 'passion' of being in the service of science, is becoming increasingly divided between needs of disciplines, universities and personal ambitions. From a Weberian perspective, it is not surprising that this has happened.

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The Social Structures of Global Academia

Edited by Fabian Cannizzo and Nick Osbaldiston

Contents